



October 15, 2019

Robert Mujica, Director  
NYS Division of Budget  
NYS Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Director Mujica:

In reviewing your recent letter to the Rochester Superintendent of Schools and the Commissioner of Education, it is apparent that there is one glaring fact missing. While the Rochester schools are facing a substantial deficit and it is imperative to identify how this came to pass, no one is suggesting that cutting \$30 million from the Rochester City School District budget will benefit the education of students. Clearly the City of Rochester does not have the funds to make up the difference, nor does the school district. But New York State could and should, not only provide this \$30 million, but provide the full \$97 million in Foundation Aid that under current state law is owed to Rochester schools.

\$97 million could dramatically alter the lives of students in Rochester. It could mean smaller class sizes, more counselors and social workers, academic supports and enrichments, librarians, college preparatory programming, vocational educational opportunities and more. New York State has the second most inequitable school funding of any state in the nation and the spending gap between rich and poor districts has grown to a record level under Governor Cuomo. Whiter and wealthier school districts in New York State spending \$30,000, \$40,000 or even \$50,000 per pupil are able to provide students with amazing opportunities. They can offer a large array of college credit Advanced Placement courses, a variety of foreign languages, numerous courses in the full range of the arts, and internships in corporate offices. This level of opportunity is not available to students in Rochester.

Despite these facts, due to the advocacy of parents with whom we work, a local youth leadership organization, dedicated employees of the Rochester schools, the local school board, and dozens of other organizations and people of good will, we have seen improvements in the Rochester schools in recent years. Most notably in the area of creating positive school climate based upon restorative practices. Across New York State, as in the rest of the country, we have a crisis at the intersection between school suspensions and systemic racism. Black students in New York State are four times more likely to be suspended than their White peers—often for lower level infractions. Rochester has taken major steps to transform their approach to student behavior. The school board adopted a new Code of Conduct, which is a model for districts around the state, and is providing a range of supports for students and faculty that are transforming the climate in many Rochester schools. The result has been a 40% reduction in suspensions and a substantial increase in students passing their classes.<sup>i</sup> In conjunction with Senator Robert Jackson we visited these programs<sup>ii</sup> in action at the Roberto Clemente School in Rochester earlier this year. It was an inspiration to see the joy and love that pervades the

school as educators and students feel supported and are able to focus on teaching and learning. These programs need to be expanded into more schools so that Rochester students will see more success stories like those at Roberto Clemente School, but now these programs, and more, could be on the chopping block.

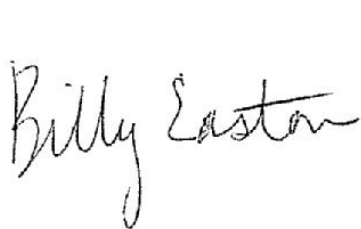
Bad bookkeeping practices by the prior administration at Rochester City School District is not a reason that students who started with less and still have less should get cuts to the quality of their education. Under current state law, Rochester is owed \$97 million in Foundation Aid as part of \$4 billion owed to schools statewide. That funding is owed based upon the objective Foundation Aid formula that was enacted in 2007 to ensure that every student in New York will receive the education that is their constitutional right.

Governor Cuomo, and his administration, has offered many excuses over the years for why he opposes providing Rochester students and students in other high need school districts the money they need to close the educational opportunity gap. But never has he directly addressed the implications of his position: at the end of the day, if the state continues to refuse to provide Rochester students the money their schools need, the state is devaluing the importance of education for Black, Brown and low income students.

We ask that the Cuomo Administration cease shirking its responsibility to Rochester's students and finally fully fund Foundation Aid. The impacts of increased funding are undeniable, national studies show that, for low income students, a sustained 20% increase in funding raises graduation rates, increases lifetime earnings by 25%, and reduces adult poverty by 20%.<sup>iiiiv</sup> Other reforms that you have advocated, such as taking away the right of voters to elect their own school board, have no factual evidence to support the idea that they are educationally effective.

Please stop passing the blame onto others when Governor Cuomo bears such tremendous responsibility for the shortage of opportunities faced by so many students in Rochester and across the state.

Sincerely yours,



Billy Easton  
Executive Director  
Alliance for Quality Education



Rosemary Rivera  
Co-Executive Director  
Citizen Action of NY



Jasmine Gripper  
Legislative Director  
Alliance for Quality Education

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.ageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/rochester\\_schoolclimatereport.pdf](http://www.ageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/rochester_schoolclimatereport.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.ageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/equityreport\\_FINAL\\_digital.pdf](http://www.ageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/equityreport_FINAL_digital.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/12/nyregion/it-turns-out-spending-more-probably-does-improve-education.html>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20118>